

Here are my thoughts on issues of plagiarism in the classroom, in case you wanted to know:

- 1) There are at least a couple of ways to approach the issue of plagiarism in a classroom setting. One is to spend the majority of the time teaching about intellectual property and why a person ought to avoid it. Another is to spend much of the time tracking down the perps. See? One way relies more on instruction and the other more on enforcement.
- 2) In writing classes I try to focus on instruction more than investigating because I believe that many instances of plagiarism are the result of ignorance rather than deception. But maybe I'm a chump. However, I agree with Rebecca Moore Howard, who points out in her research that teaching is our primary job and that many plagiarism detection tools like [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) actually violate students' copyright. See also <http://faculty.tamu-commerce.edu/bolin/murphy.html> for an example of an eager prof who was humbled into the epiphany that eagerness can get you into trouble.
- 3) Even focusing on instruction, I do a little sleuthing when my suspicion is raised. In fact—and it pains me to report this—I have discovered at least one case of plagiarism in each of the past six semesters. And I'm talking about blatant, copied-straight-from-somewhere-else, no-question-about-it plagiarism. Even after careful instruction in my writing classes about how to document and about the importance of doing one's own work, some students will cheat.
- 4) I think it might be too lenient to suggest a grade of zero for the assignment in question. I think that many students tempted to plagiarize because of heavy workloads, close deadlines, or general fiendishness will decide that a zero is worth the risk because it's the same grade they'd get if they didn't try to plagiarize and just failed to turn in something. The university policy here involves suspending or expelling the student. Instead, I give the student an F for the course, only because I want the student to stay in school and learn from that mistake. Secondary schools, with their more rigid attendance policies, call for different strategies to incorporate meaningful action. Options might include detention or in-school suspension or some similar measure.
- 5) You can reduce instances of plagiarism on research projects by requiring students to submit copies of their sources. If they're using print articles or online articles, they can photocopy or print them for you. That way, if they're submitting someone else's paper, at least they have to look up the sources. Also, you can check their competence in citing material. Does this take a long time? You bet. So does practically anything involved with the teaching of writing.
- 6) Plagiarism is like speeding: people will do it if they think they need to and can get away with it. First, teach them how to drive. Then, explain why people shouldn't speed. Finally, point some radar out there once in a while, just to diminish the attraction of speeding.